

Brazil

An array of problems

by Mark Sonnenblick

Brazil entered the nuclear age when the Angra I power station achieved critical mass on March 14, 1982. Yet the future of nuclear energy in Brazil is quite uncertain.

Angra I was built by Westinghouse under the Atoms for Peace program. Then in 1975, Brazil signed "the nuclear deal of the century" with the Kraftwerke Union run by West Germany's Siemens. That contract provided for eight nuclear plants, and enrichment and reprocessing facilities to be built by 1990. Brazil is using the world's most modern nuclear engineering facility to make components for this program and for export to countries such as Argentina. The objective of the program is to develop in Brazil the capabilities to make 100

percent of the nuclear stations by its completion.

The nuclear program, however, has been stretched out—first to a 1995 deadline and then to 2000. Brazil is suffering a sharp recession as a result of high U.S. interest rates. International bankers and local leftists are demanding that Brazil abandon its commitment to become an advanced industrial nation by the end of the century. "If Brazil is not to continue rapid industrial growth, why should it invest in electricity?" the bankers ask.

On March 3, 1982 the government announced a new energy-investment plan which scrubbed the schedule of Nuclebras, the state nuclear energy company, for 14 plants by 2000. Under the government's new *Plan for Meeting Year 2000 Energy Needs*, only eight new plants will be built by the year 2000. Angra II, presently under construction, will be finished in 1987. Only one other plant will be started before President João Figueiredo leaves office in 1984, while the fate of the others.

One of the reasons why the Brazilian government insists it will eventually build the eight contracted plants is that the West Germans have repeatedly stated that the enrichment and reprocessing facilities come only with the full package. Wall Street bankers, however, claim confidently that no additional power stations will be started, and they hold up the steady erosion of the nuclear budget as their evidence.

Despite this pressure, Brazil's pro-development spokesmen remain committed to the necessity of nuclear-energy development. Such is the case, for instance, with Dr. Shigeaki Ueki, the President of Petrobrás, Brazil's state-owned petroleum company, who in a recent exclusive interview with *EIR* (see Special Report, May 18), stated the following:

"Since it is a form of energy that demands profound technological knowledge and requires high rates of capital investment, we have to prepare ourselves intensely for the use of nuclear power. Even with our ample supply of hydroelectric energy—and we still have many hydroelectric sources to take advantage of—there is always the necessity of a thermal complement. Before nuclear energy became commercial worldwide, Brazil based its electrical system on hydroelectric and thermal derived from either coal or oil. . . . [Now] we are going to have more thermal energy based on coal and nuclear power, and less on oil, which has become the most expensive energy source in the world.

"Brazil must immediately begin to not only invest in new nuclear plants as a complement for the electrical system, but also to develop its technicians so that when we have finally taken advantage of all our hydroelectric potential—and this, of course, depends on the [rate of] development of our country—we are going to have to intensively use the uranium deposits that we have in the country through the construction of thermonuclear plants."

